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Chile: The Issue of US Certification

The possibility that the United States might certify Argentina for a resumption of military sales and assistance while continuing to withhold certification for Chile initially prompted Chilean President Pinochet last fall to take steps to improve his regime's image on human rights issues. Pinochet continued to balk, however, at extraditing the persons indicted by a US grand jury for the Letelier/Moffit murders in 1976, and this has impeded certification. Frustrated by his overall lack of progress at obtaining US certification, Pinochet in February fired Foreign Minister Rojas—who had pushed for moderate reform—and backpedaled on some other initiatives. Nonetheless, the certification question remains important for Chile's national security interests, and thus keeps alive the chance that Pinochet will consider some adjustments on human rights and the pace of transition to civilian rule. However, in view of Pinochet's clear determination to give priority to internal security over international considerations, we do not expect any major conclusion.

Certification Requirements and Benefits

To lift the ban on US arms sales and military assistance to Chile, the Reagan administration must certify to the US Congress that Chile:

- Has made significant progress in complying with internationally recognized principles of human rights.
- Is not aiding and abetting international terrorism.
- Has fully cooperated in bringing to justice those indicted by a US grand jury in connection with the Letelier/Moffit murders in Washington.

In addition to the military benefits that would accrue to Chile from certification, the regime's international image—and perhaps creditworthiness—would improve.

To achieve these benefits, Pinochet undertook at least three initiatives during last fall:

- He sought to improve Chile's human rights image by stressing—in diplomatic contacts and the media—that his government is adhering to its timetable for returning the country to civilian rule in the 1990s. In line with this, he appointed a commission to study constitutional laws
- Santiago publicized the work of a high-level government commission that studied the problems of Chile's exiles and took under advisement the commission's recommendations for the return of some 400 exiles.
- Chile courted Washington by supporting many US positions in the 1982 UN General Assembly and in other international and regional organizations. Moreover, as the only South American nation to participate with the United States in the 1982 UNITAS naval exercises, Chile resisted a post-Falklands regional trend.

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Negotiations

[redacted] for Chilean participation in UNITAS in 1983 and other joint military exercises are well advanced.

Pinochet's Response

Considering his efforts and what he viewed as positive US responses, we believe Pinochet was disappointed by the failure of the Reagan administration to certify Chile in the "lame duck" session of the US Congress. We also suspect that he was upset at the extension in December 1982 of the UN's mandate to examine Chile's human rights record. As a result, Pinochet backtracked somewhat in early 1983. He fired Foreign Minister Rojas, who had been a proponent of continuing the reforms. He disbanded the exile commission [redacted]

[redacted] These moves, in turn, strengthened cabinet hardliners and disappointed Chileans who had hoped that the government was becoming more flexible.

Regional security concerns are, nonetheless, keeping alive the possibility that Pinochet will take additional measures to gain renewed US military assistance. One consideration is that arch rival Argentina, already militarily superior, may be certified and thus have easier access to US weapons. Pinochet is especially concerned that this would tip the balance in favor of Buenos Aires in the longstanding Beagle Channel dispute. Chilean Government officials may also view the certification of Argentina alone as inherently unfair, since they removed from power a Marxist government, adopted free market economic policies, and believe they have a better human rights record than the Argentine Government, which Chile believes behaved irresponsibly in the Falklands conflict and has been more open with the Soviets. Finally, although Chile has been able to obtain equipment from non-US suppliers since 1976, it believes the US embargo is now undermining its defensive capabilities at a time when it needs to counter military buildups not only in Argentina, but also in Peru. The inability to obtain spare parts for their US-built F5s—Chile's frontline interceptors—is especially disturbing to military officials.

Outlook

We doubt that Pinochet will make major human rights and political concessions, because he:

- Believes rapid democratization would breed chaos.
- Is facing increasing economic and political pressures in 1983 and, in view of his past record, is more likely to respond with tougher policies than concessions.
- Does not want to be seen as being submissive to the United States.
- Fears certification could be reversed easily by later US Congresses or administrations.
- May come to believe that certification will depend on his extradition of former Directorate of National Intelligence agents—including Manuel Contreras—who are charged in the Leuvelier/Moffit case. In our view, this is something that he is very unlikely to do.

If Argentina alone is certified, we expect a strongly nationalistic reaction from many sectors of Chilean society. Pinochet's siege mentality would be aggravated, and existing anti-American feeling among junior officers would intensify. Chile probably would pull out of the 1983 UNITAS exercises [redacted]

[redacted] Santiago would be inclined to adopt more anti-US positions on international issues and become less responsive to human rights pressures.

Certification for Argentina and not for Chile also could have important domestic consequences. The position of moderates in the government who have argued for progress in human rights would be weakened as Pinochet turned to a harder line. Advocates of a more "nationalist" economic policy could be strengthened, while labor and human rights groups, which depend on US moral support to bolster their positions, probably would come under greater pressure from the regime.

Chile: Change in MIR Tactics

The Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) remains the most violence-prone opposition group in Chile, but heavy personnel losses last month and the apparently growing cohesion of Chile's nonviolent leftist political organizations have caused MIR leaders to reevaluate their group's structure and tactics.

[REDACTED]

We doubt that the MIR will completely suspend military operations, but believe that it will scale them back in coming months as the group attempts to recover from its recent setbacks and weighs the option of closer cooperation with the Chilean Communist Party (PCCH).

During March and April, the MIR tried to recapture public attention and support by significantly increasing the bombing of water, electrical, subway, and railroad facilities.

[REDACTED]

We believe that the increase in low-risk bombings could indicate the MIR's declining capability to carry out more sophisticated terrorist activities.

Instead of generating support for the MIR, these attempts have drawn media criticism and strong counterattacks from police and Carabinero intelligence units.

[REDACTED]

The MIR was heavily involved in rural activism during the Allende regime, and southern Chile's high unemployment and farm foreclosure rates make it an attractive area for MIR organizing efforts.

The MIR's recent setbacks and its concerns over competition from the other leftist groups may have improved chances for a closer alliance with the Chilean Communist Party. We believe that MIR leaders have been concerned for some time that the organization's image and position in Chile are declining and that other leftist groups are drawing away actual or potential MIR supporters. Cooperation between the PCCH and the MIR has been blocked in the past by disagreements over the latter's use of violence, but the weakened state of the MIR might make it more willing now to compromise on questions of strategy.

[REDACTED]

Based on the MIR's past history, we believe its shift away from terrorist activity is only temporary. The MIR's previous foreign supporters—including Cuba, Nicaragua, East Germany, and Libya—will probably provide more training and funding in order to restore the group's military capability. While the rebuilding process takes place—including increased domestic recruiting and infiltration of MIR members from abroad—we expect sporadic bombings to continue.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]